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**Title: Caregiver's experiences of canine-assisted therapy on children with special needs: A qualitative exploratory study**

### **ABSTRACT**

The prevalence of Developmental Delay (DD), Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were increasing in Hong Kong. The children with these disorders were defined as children with special needs (CSN). Apart from the mainstream interventions of CSN, animal-assisted therapy (AAT) was also found effective in enhancing their social, behavioural and emotional functionings. Canine-assisted therapy (CAT) would be focused in this study. This study was to explore the caregivers' experiences of CAT on CSN. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted and content analysis was adopted. Four categories had emerged: (1) caregivers' changes, (2) perceived children's changes, (3) perceived role of service providers and (4) factors affecting the participation. It was perceived that there were behavioral, psychological and social changes in caregivers and CSN, different roles in therapist and therapy dog and both encouraging and discouraging factors influencing caregivers' selection of CAT. There were some limitations in this study. Yet, this study offered some implications to the government and nurse and some suggestions for further study.